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STATE FOR DRL/AE SUSAN CORKE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: HOW TO SUCCEED IN LAW SCHOOL WITHOUT REALLY TRYING

REF: PRAGUE DAILY OCTOBER 21

Classified By: CDA Mary Thompson-Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A scandal at the Plzen-based University of West Bohemia law school, where a number of graduates allegedly received degrees on a fast-track basis, has several elements of a classic corruption story: potentially undue influence on state tenders, lack of transparency in school procedures, politicians and other well-placed individuals receiving special treatment, and allegations of involvement by organized crime. Multiple investigations into the scandal are proceeding, bringing hope that a clearer picture of the problem will soon emerge. Even if the investigations bring positive changes, however, the larger corruption issues may be left unaddressed. A joke is making the rounds: "What are you doing this weekend?" Answer: "Getting a law degree." End Summary.

Shenanigans at Plzen Law

¶2. (SBU) The Plzen law story began when a law student noticed that Vice Dean Ivan Tomazic had plagiarized a number of pages in his dissertation. The press quickly jumped on the story, revealing that politicians, law faculty, police officers, customs officials, and family members of mafia figures obtained law degrees in the last several years without completing the five-year program. In some cases, individuals allegedly received the degree after two months. Moreover, dozens of dissertations were missing from the law library. Dean and former Justice Minister Jiri Pospisil, brought in to address the scandal, fired Dean Jaroslav Zacharias and Tomazic last month. Both men had stepped down from their leadership roles after the scandal broke but continued to teach. Vice Dean Milan Kindl resigned from his leadership role and agreed to leave the faculty by the end of October.

¶3. (C) Vladimira Dvorakova, president of the country's university accreditation commission, told poloffs she continues to believe organized crime was involved in setting up the system, with the goal of controlling officials once in office. She thinks the problem dates back to the beginning of the decade (the law school was founded in 1991). Dvorakova also placed heavy emphasis on the tight relations between the school's leaders and the Institute for State and Law. The Institute, within the Academy of Sciences, provides expert legal research. Dean Zacharias served from 2007 to 2009 as director of the Institute, and Vice Dean Kindl was editor-in-chief of Pravník ("Lawyer"), the Institute's legal magazine. An Institute analysis purportedly drafted by Kindl and signed by Zacharias recommended that a 115 billion koruna (\$6.5 billion) environmental cleanup project be treated as a concession project, not a public tender. In a concession project, the government grants a private company a concession to complete the project. In this case, Transparency

International Country Director David Ondracka argued in one news article, there is a serious risk of a cartel agreement by bidding firms. The inchoate environmental cleanup project is a brewing issue in the country, with many individuals and organizations criticizing its extensive scope and lack of detail.

¶4. (C) Dvorakova also strongly criticized the school's lack of transparency, ranging from unclear entrance requirements and attendance policies to its dissertation review procedures. Dvorakova estimates that up to 60 percent of applicants gained admission to the school in unorthodox ways.

In several cases, she said, graduates of Charles University Law School (the country's most prestigious university) who were unable to pass final exams at Charles transferred to Plzen and took the final exams there, thus earning a Plzen degree. The school's records are not electronic, she said, and a standard process to ensure impartial dissertation reviews does not exist. Dvorakova said the accreditation commission has been reviewing the school for some time, and recommended restricting the school's accreditation for Ph.D students in June 2008. (Note: Law degrees, entitling an individual to practice law, are obtained after a five-year course of study. The degree awarded is M.A., or Mgr. A JUDr., or judicial doctorate, is obtained by submitting a written work any time after receiving the Mgr. degree. A Ph.D requires research and a dissertation. End Note.)

¶5. (SBU) The press continues to report on individual cases of quick or unusual degrees awarded by Plzen law. Civic Democratic Party (ODS) MP Marek Benda admitted he used the same dissertation to attain two degrees from the law school, and acknowledged that the dissertation in any event did not meet requirements. Controversial Chomutov Mayor Ivana Rapkova (ODS), who has taken a strong stance against (mostly) Romani debtors in her town, cannot provide her thesis or transcript and does not remember her faculty advisors or professors. One of her professors provided attendance records showing that Rapkova, though enrolled, never attended his course.

Addressing the Scandal

¶6. (C) Several separate investigations are underway. The university's Academic Senate this week elected acting dean and former Justice Minister Jiri Pospisil as permanent dean of the school. Pospisil has already introduced changes regarding study requirements, enrollment procedures, and dissertation reviews. Pospisil, an ODS MP who will probably run for parliament in the May 2010 elections, has indicated that he plans to remain only until the issues at the school are resolved. The rector of the University of West Bohemia also appointed a commission to investigate the problem. Although some officials argued against an internal commission, Dvorakova believes it is an impartial group. Dvorakova also noted that the accreditation commission plans to make a recommendation on the law school's status by November 25, and that the Academy of Sciences is investigating the Institute for State and Law. Finally, the Ministry of Education filed a criminal complaint against the school (Ref), but a Plzen judge dismissed the case. The Ministry plans to re-file the case in Prague. According to Education Minister Miroslava Kopicova, the Ministry of Education is auditing all university degrees to restore faith in the Czech university system.

Fast-Track Degrees A Widespread Problem?

¶7. (C) Dvorakova said she believes isolated cases of fast-track degrees are probably present at all universities, in particular private schools that opened their doors in the post-communist era. For example, the press reported this week that several Prague politicians received degrees from the Prague-based University of Finance and Administration in

less than the normal time. The politicians claimed they had individual study plans, but employees at the university said individual plans are not possible. Despite this, Dvorakova thinks the Plzen case is the worst that will emerge.

Larger Corruption Issues May Be Left Unaddressed

18. (C) Comment: The Plzen law school scandal highlights the ongoing corruption problems in the country. The scandal has some legs; tighter restrictions on Plzen law will no doubt continue to be imposed and public officials will be less likely to circumvent regular degree requirements. Whether the larger problems that have been alleged in connection with the case -- a corrupt public tender process, an organized crime role in placing public officials in positions of influence in the government -- will be addressed is another issue. To date, the scandal has touched only Civic Democrat (ODS) politicians. If one party features heavily in this scandal, it could emerge during next year's parliamentary elections. End Comment.

Thompson-Jones